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Monsters and angels

Visual press coverage of child murders in the USA and UK, 1930–2000

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ABSTRACT

The crime of child murder is considered the most heinous and least comprehensible of all violent crimes. This study examines the visual representation of 12 high profile child abductions and murders in broadsheet and tabloid newspapers from two countries over a 70-year time frame. The body of coverage produced almost 1000 images and these were examined using a content analysis of the individual subjects of these photographs, followed by a qualitative analysis of the main patterns which emerged. The study produced two expected findings: that the coverage has become increasingly visual, and that the visuals were overwhelmingly 'personal'. Within these overarching patterns, it was clear that the content of the visuals has changed over the three decades studied (the 1930s, 1960s and 1990s). In the earlier decades the visuals emphasized the role of the criminal justice system in capturing the perpetrators and bringing them to justice. In the 1990s there was a far greater focus on the victims' families, as well as the emotional responses of society as a whole: both grief for the child, and anger towards their killers and the authorities which 'enabled' them to offend. I explore these changes and the possible impact this visual coverage could have on public understanding of this crime, those who commit it, and how we treat them.

KEY WORDS ■ children ■ crime ■ historical ■ newspapers ■ paedophilia
■ photographs

In order to explore how crime has been visually represented in the press, this study examines photographs from the newspaper coverage of 12 notorious cases of child murder. As Sturken and Cartwright (2001) argue, visual images are central to how we 'represent, make meaning, and communicate in the world around us' (p. 1) and I therefore use these newspaper images to understand how these individual stories of violence and loss have been shared

within the culture. Images have long been recognized as powerful forces, particularly in journalism. When photographs entered the daily routine of newspapers, they were hailed as the ultimate proof of objectivity (Zelizer, 1995). Walter Lippmann, writing in 1922, argued that:

photographs have the kind of authority over imagination today, which the printed word had yesterday, and the spoken word before that. They seem utterly real. They come, we imagine directly to us, without human meddling, and they are the most effortless food for the mind conceivable. (p. 92)

Newspapers have been heavily dependent on crime news since the turn of the last century, when close relationships between reporters and police departments developed because of the reliance on crime stories by the sensationalist 'penny presses'. These trends continued and crime stories remain a staple of daily news coverage in both broadsheets and tabloids, presenting a mediated commentary on everyday experiences of crime and the criminal justice system (Cohen and Young, 1973; Ericson et al., 1991; Jewkes, 2004). In the last 20 years, there has been a professionalization of relations between the police and the media, and police forces now have media relations departments which specifically organize photo opportunities whereby press photographers are invited to film ongoing activities in the police investigation (Ericson et al., 1989; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994; Simmons, 1999). The symbiotic relationship that has developed means that during high profile crimes the police actively encourage photojournalists to take pictures of them undertaking the investigation, a situation which helps both the police and the journalist (Innes, 2003; Leishman and Mason, 2003; Reiner, 2003). The result is more standardization, and therefore increased competition for original images.

Undoubtedly, media representations of crime can influence public understanding, as the majority of people have little first hand experience of crime, particularly violent crime. This study is based on the premise that photographs in the news can prevent critical engagement, acting as they do as a visual chronicle of events. It is assumed photographs illustrate the 'truth', sharing just what the eye can see with the readers of the newspaper. It is for this reason that I believe it is so critical to study visual representations of crime, particularly concerning a crime so infused with emotion as child abduction and murder. How did the photographs depict the central characters in the unfolding dramas: the victims, the offenders and the criminal justice system? What role do images play in the construction of news about a particular crime? Have they played the same role over time?

This study is drawn from a larger research project, which analysed the newspaper coverage of cases of child abduction and subsequent murder by a stranger. The study examined the ways in which broadsheet and tabloid newspapers

reported 12 high profile crimes, sampled from the USA and the UK, from three decades: the 1930s, 1960s and 1990s. My interest was sparked by the particularly frenzied press attention which surrounded the murder of two schoolgirls in Soham, England, in August 2002. Was this a British phenomenon?¹ Had the coverage always looked like this? These three decades were chosen on the basis of purposive sampling. The 1930s was a decade in which fears about child abduction in the USA were raised by the Lindbergh baby kidnapping. In Britain in the 1960s the Moors Murders received substantial commentary, and in the 1990s both countries were gripped with fears about paedophiles released into the community, caused by a number of such cases (most famously Polly Klaas and Megan Kanka in the USA, and Sophie Hook and Sarah Payne in the UK).

The power of photographs ultimately lies in their ability to simultaneously function on two levels (Barthes, 1977; Sekula, 1974; Tagg, 1988; Worth, 1976; Zelizer, 1995, 1998). On the one hand, photographs work denotatively, as Lippmann (1992) states, appearing to display 'naturally', real life events. On the other hand, images work connotatively, drawing on broad symbolic systems, visually representing much larger hidden codes of meaning. Photography provides the illusion of evidence, seeming to display the facts of an event objectively. Photographs both capture and create reality and it is the role news images play in reinforcing the myth of objectivity that underscores the importance of examining visuals in journalism (Zelizer, 1995; 1998). News images literally ask readers to 'see for themselves', limiting critical inquiry of the story with which they are being presented. As Sontag (1977) eloquently argues, therein lies their appeal as well as difficulty. 'Photographs furnish evidence . . . The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture' (p. 5).

In Barthes' *Image/Music/Text* (1977), he argued that the selection processes through which news photographs pass help to create ideological products. He argued that the photograph 'is an object that has been worked on, chosen, composed, constructed, treated according to professional, aesthetic or ideological norms which are so many factors of connotation' (p.19). The filtering process starts from the moment the picture is taken, simply because of the technologies of the lens, which automatically influence the point of view and frame of a shot, choosing and eliminating different aspects from the picture edge. From there, the image arrives on the desk of the picture editor, who then manipulates the image further, cropping out 'unnecessary detail', zooming in on faces or objects, choosing size, designs and layouts which will influence the 'preferred' reading.

The process by which news images are selected parallels that of text, and demonstrates the extent to which the literature on news selection processes also applies to photographs. News images are subject to the same hurdles in terms of selection, interpretation and, often, modification as they work their

way through the processes of newsmaking. Just as reporters and editors decide which story topics are chosen and how they will be presented, similar 'gatekeeping' decision makers influence images in news.

The study

In total, 1110 articles were retrieved, which produced 911 visuals, almost all of them photographs. The purpose of this study is to consider the visual representations of a particular crime, and it is less concerned with the comparisons which emerge about geography or newspaper type (see Wardle, 2006). However, the material which emerged from the wider study provided an interesting body of data from which to explore the visual representations of child murder.

Slightly less than half of the sample (499 articles) included photographs alongside the text (Table 1). The average number of visuals for each article was just under 2 (1.82), resulting in a total of 911 images, thereby making the visuals a fundamental element of the coverage. These crimes received greater amounts of coverage over the course of the three decades.

As I have explored elsewhere (Wardle, 2006), there are three converging factors which help to explain this trend of increasing coverage. First, in the 1930s and 1960s, whilst these crimes were considered shocking, they were defined and described as isolated, motiveless murders (rather than sexual assaults which ended in murder) committed upon young girls who were unfortunately in the wrong place at the wrong time. By the 1990s, the sexual motives of the offenders had been widely acknowledged and fears increased about the perceived threat of 'predatory paedophiles' stalking communities. As a result, these rare but tragic instances seemed to touch the wider public's imagination. Newspaper editors, well aware that such a story meets almost all established news values, covered the crimes in greater detail and visual accompaniment.

Editors use the fact that certain crimes significantly influence circulation to justify the extensive coverage, arguing that their readers are driving the increased levels of coverage. For example, in a defence of the criticisms levelled at newspapers by the Metropolitan Police Commission Sir Ian Blair about the disproportionate coverage devoted to certain crime stories, the former editor of the *Guardian* Peter Preston acknowledged, 'Readers were transfixed the

Table 1 The percentage of visuals included in the coverage from the different decades

	1930s	1960s	1990s	Total
Percentage of total visuals	12%	23%	65%	911

moment the two Soham girls vanished. Universal nightmare time. Ratings and sales went up instantly' (Preston, 2006: 12). The second factor is newspaper competition, which has become increasingly fierce as readership levels have declined. Such a high profile story sells newspapers, and large, colourful visuals on a front page and throughout the newspaper attract readers. Finally, the increase in amount, size and colour of photographs was expected considering the technological developments in the way newspapers are designed and produced. The increased visuality in the coverage is therefore not surprising, but examining the ways in which the photographs were used over the different decades demonstrates that visual coverage of this crime has not remained static. It has been influenced by the same cultural norms which influence the creation and selection of news texts.

The original research project was designed to produce a three-dimensional comparison: cultural, temporal and newspaper type. Twelve cases were sampled, with four taken from each decade. In each country, the two murders which received the most news coverage in the selected decades were chosen, and all coverage for those crimes was sampled in three newspapers. Coverage was analysed from six newspapers (three broadsheets and three tabloids): the *London Times*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror* in Britain, and the *New York Times*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *New York Daily News* in the USA. I had originally wanted to use a broadsheet, tabloid and 'middle-brow' newspaper from each country, but it was impossible to compare the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Daily Mail* with each other as a distinct category, so the former was used as an example of a broadsheet, and the latter, a tabloid. The US newspapers are all located on the upper Eastern seaboard, as the absence of a national press in the USA provided difficulties in terms of sampling. Taking newspapers with a similar geographical location ensured all newspapers could potentially cover crimes identically, as proximity to the crime would not influence the coverage.

Each of the 1110 articles was analysed using a two-step process. First, a content analysis was undertaken and the individual subject of each of the 911 photographs was noted, for example 'victim's mother' or 'police officer'. The individual content of each photograph was then systematically coded as either 'personal', 'institutional' or 'societal'. 'Personal' images included photographs of the offender, victim and their families; 'institutional' images focused on the unfolding drama of the police investigation or the court proceedings; and 'societal' images emphasized how these crimes affected, but also reflected, the local communities as well as the wider society. These three broad perspectives covered all but 14 (1.5%) of the photographs included in this body of coverage. The coding was carried out by the author and a graduate student, and inter-coder reliability was achieved using Holsti's (1969) inter-coder reliability statistics measuring the degree of agreement between two coders. The

reliability statistics were based on a sample of 120 photographs (10 randomly selected from each case). Reliability of .90 was achieved. Second, the patterns which emerged in the content analysis were explored more fully using a qualitative visual analysis. This stage of the analysis included an in-depth consideration of the initial patterns which emerged during the content analysis; the relationship between the visuals and the text; the captions; and the selection, composition and colouring of the photographs.

Reflecting changes in attitudes towards victims, the offenders and the justice system

Although overall similar types of visuals occurred in the two countries and different types of newspaper, there were differences in the way visuals were used across the three decades. This was particularly the case when the overarching themes of 'personal', 'institutional' and 'societal' visuals were broken down.

Table 2 demonstrates the overwhelming reliance on 'personal' visuals in this coverage, but more specifically it shows that within this category of photograph there have been some changes. Photographs of the offenders are particularly interesting. One pattern to emerge was that photographs of the offenders were the most common category of photograph (38%) in the 1930s, followed by photographs of the victim (32%). In contrast, by the 1990s, only 18 per cent of the photographs were of the offender and 29 per cent were of the

Table 2 The breakdown of visuals in the three decades

		1930s	1960s	1990s
'Personal'	Victim	35 (32%)	39 (18%)	168 (29%)
	Victim's family	11 (10%)	22 (10%)	123 (21%)
	Offender	42 (38%)	38 (18%)	108 (18%)
	Offender's family	4 (4%)	24 (11%)	7 (1%)
'Institutional'	Courtroom	4 (4%)	24 (11%)	8 (1%)
	Politicians	0	0	7 (1%)
	Police	7 (6%)	44 (21%)	58 (10%)
'Societal'	Community grief	1 (1%)	3 (1%)	41 (7%)
	Community anger	0	6 (3%)	19 (3%)
	Nostalgic images	0	0	8 (1%)
	Area shots	4 (4%)	10 (5%)	30 (5%)
	Other	2 (2%)	3 (1%)	11 (2%)
Total		110	213	588

victim. These numbers also demonstrate a move towards photographs of the victims' families, with 21 per cent of the photographs in the 1990s using them as the subject compared with only 10 per cent in the 1930s.

The table also demonstrates the increase in 'societal' themed photographs in the 1990s. I can offer three reasons for these differences. The first are institutional factors which affect journalistic access to the police, offenders and victims' families. It is much more difficult for a reporter to gain access to the offender, whereas members of the victims' families are more likely to co-operate with the news media in the hope that it will help solve the crime or keep it in the public's consciousness. An additional explanation involves shifting societal norms regarding the criminal justice system, offenders, victims and their families' rights. In earlier decades there was an understanding that the victim's family was entitled to a significant degree of privacy, however it is also necessary to acknowledge the rise of the Victims' Rights Movement, which has privileged the voice of the victim certainly over the offender, but also over the criminal justice system. Thirdly, the trend towards more 'societal' visuals apparent in the coverage from the 1990s can be partly explained by the 'confessional culture' which has grown increasingly prevalent over the past two decades. It seems to have brought the 'public' firmly into the coverage about these types of crimes, showing public grief alongside anger and acts of vengeance.

This historical study would suggest there is not a 'natural' way to visually represent crime, even similar types of crime, and should encourage more longitudinal newspaper analyses which can challenge some of our common assumptions about how newspapers work, and perhaps offer some alternative suggestions for how the coverage could look.

From the photographs in the study, it would seem that in the 1930s, picture editors were obsessed with visual representations of law and order, persuading their readers that the police were doing all they could to secure their safety, publishing numerous photographs of police officers conducting their inquiries. Once the offender had been captured, photographs of them would appear frequently, always accompanied by police officers, demonstrating literally that they were in the custody of the police and they were no longer a threat to the community. Juxtaposed with these images were others that strongly emphasized the youth and innocence of the victims, showing their smiling faces surrounded by ornate floral borders. These types of poses continued throughout the other two decades, but the visuals became more 'realistic'. There was almost no visual representation of the 'public' suggesting that in this decade at least, the fallout to these crimes was considered solely a private family affair. By the 1960s, law and order continued as a strong theme and the police were regularly pictured conducting their duties, but the reactions of the community had also

seeped into the coverage. The crimes from this period illustrated the impact on the local community in ways not seen previously, and photographs of the funerals and local community protests about the offenders gradually emerged. By the 1990s, the photographs emphasized how these crimes were not just impacting the local community, but society as a whole. Photographs of public displays of grieving as well as shrines and vigils were mixed in with nostalgic images of childhood and public protests against paedophiles being released into communities. But most significantly, the visuals from this decade were overwhelmingly of the victims and their families, juxtaposed with relatively infrequent images of the untreatable paedophile, depicted through a combination of photo selection, colouring and labelling as 'detached', 'monstrous' and 'predatory'.

1930s

Law and order: police and the offender

The most common form of the 'institutional' image were photographs of the police 'doing their job' – searching for the missing child, carrying out their investigations to catch the killer, or accompanying the offender to or from custody.² These photographs connoted the police as agents of social control, reassuring the public that the authorities were carrying out their duties – protecting the public, and bringing criminals to justice. In earlier decades, the close relationship between the police and crime beat reporters was notorious. In one example from the *New York Daily News*, there is a photograph of the offender Lloyd Price recreating how he strangled Helen Sterler (*New York Daily News*, 28 August 1933, p. 3). The frame is made up of two shots. One shows Lloyd Price with three police officers, underlining the fact that the offender is in custody, but the focus is on a close-up of Price's upper body. In this shot, the offender is staring at the camera with his hands held up in a strangling position. Quite clearly the reporter, with the help of the police, 'forced' the offender to recreate the crime for the camera. Therefore, although the newspaper photographer was not at the scene of the crime, with this image the newspaper manages to recreate the events, underlying its role as chronicler.

The 'innocent victims'

There are two ways that childhood is represented visually in the West. Images can be:

[of] children who are dangerous [as well as] those who are themselves in deadly danger . . . of children who are both damaged and damaging [and] of children who are sexually or intellectually precocious and others who are aggressive, assertive or out of control. (Holland, 2004: xi)

As Jewkes (2004) reminds us, children are defined at either end of a spectrum, as 'tragic victims' or 'evil monsters', but in the coverage of these crimes, the latter depiction was saved for the offenders.

Patricia Holland (1992) in 'Childhood and the Uses of Photography' described the relationship between photography and children in the 19th century as 'the innocent eye in search of the innocent subject' (p. 17). Ideologies of innocence were associated with such images through the Romantic association of children and nature. Certainly, in the 1930s, images of the victims appeared regularly in the coverage, emphasizing their innocence and vulnerability, and often combining images of nature. The children would appear in their 'Sunday best' framed in ornate floral borders. Very frequently the borders would be an oval shape, a convention still used in the press to signify honour and respect (Huxford, 2001). In the coverage of these crimes, square images of the offenders would frequently be overlayed with smaller oval images of the victims, immediately juxtaposing 'good' with 'evil'.

These themes of innocence and protection were visible throughout the images from this sample, and these, along with images of the police undertaking searches for the body, are the only types of image that appear with similar frequency in all three decades. As Holland asserts (1992), by the end of the 20th century, photographs of children emphasized a childhood secure in the heart of the family. As I discuss later, by the 1990s the irrational fear of losing a child to the clutches of a strange man was made more threatening because of the relative lack of risk for children today as a result of social and medical advances. Irrespective of these advances, irrational risks define the relations parents have with their children and there remains an 'iconography of childhood based on the need to protect children from a hostile world' (quoted in Kember, 1995: 123).

1960s

In this decade, the images began to show the local communities, in terms of grieving for the loss of a child and anger aimed at the offenders.

Community grief

A small number of photographs from this period showed the community grieving. By the 1960s, the number of 'societal' images had increased, particularly in the US tabloid the *New York Daily News*. Most notable was a double-page spread of photographs taken at the funerals of Noreen Buckley and Margaret Kennedy in Morristown, New Jersey, showing the outpouring of grief from the local community, under the headline 'Tears and Charges in N.J.' (24 June 1962, pp. 56–7). Similarly, in the UK, the funeral of Christine Darby was attended by a large crowd from her local community and the press published a number of photographs of the events there. On the front cover of the *Daily Mirror* a large photograph of Christine's mother, supported by the local reverend, is headlined with 'A Town Shares This Mother's Grief', with a sub-headline '2,000 Say a Sad Farewell to Murdered Christine' (1 September 1967, p. 1). *The Times* ran an image showing the funeral cortège in the street surrounded by people (1 September 1967, p. 3). The *Daily Mail* included an image of the large crowds at the funeral, but focused on the faces of two undercover policemen, with the headline 'In the Crowd at Christine's Funeral: Two Men Looking for a Killer' and a caption 'Watchers Among the Weepers' (1 September 1967, p. 5).

Community anger

The coverage of the Edith Kiecorius murder in 1961 included a number of photographs of the angry community reaction, all of them in the *New York Daily News*. One headline read 'Rush Murder Rap as Crowd Yells Threats' (*New York Daily News*, 2 March 1961, p. 3), as the related double photo spread in centre pages read 'Police Guard Killer From Menacing Crowds' (*New York Daily News*, 2 March 1961, pp. 40–1). Other photographs showed mobs protesting outside the two police stations in which the offender Fred Thompson was held. One photograph included the caption 'Crowd gathers at police barracks [. . .] there was talk of drastic justice' (*New York Daily News*, 1 March 1961, pp. 34–5). Another photograph illustrated an angry mob waiting outside the police station confining Fred Thompson, the girl's killer, holding signs which read: 'ELECTRIC CHAIR FOR THE KILLER' and 'HE IS NOT A CRAZY MAN, HE IS A KILLER' (*New York Daily News*, 1 March 1961, p. 3). Identical scenes were witnessed in New Jersey in reaction to the Morristown murders. One caption in the *New York Daily News* read 'Towns people gather on sidewalk in front of prosecutor's office, where Vance was questioned yesterday' (24 June 1962, pp. 56–57).

Similarly, in the UK, one of only two photographs in the London *Times* in their coverage of the Moors Murders (still commonly deemed the most shocking and outrageous crime of the 20th century in Britain) was of a crowd gathered

outside the courtroom to demonstrate against Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, with the caption reading 'Police hold back the crowd as a van carrying Ian Brady and Myra Hindley leaves Chester Assizes yesterday' (7 May 1966, p. 1). By this decade, the newspapers no longer framed these crimes as private tragedies experienced by the immediate family. The amount of coverage of these crimes increased, and therefore awareness among the community increased. This awareness led to local community protests against the individual offenders and a desire to share in the grief experienced by the families.

1990s

While images of the offender were common across the study periods, by the 1990s, they were not represented solely as unfortunate, maladjusted loners; they were visually constructed and labelled as 'paedophiles'. The traditional linguistic metaphor used to describe paedophiles is the predator; watching, stalking, and then pouncing on 'his' prey. It would appear that this metaphor also works visually, as many of the images of the offenders in the 1990s focused on their eyes, with extreme close-ups of their faces and features. The visuals emphasized the idea that 'they are watching you', but the 'you' in this situation is 'your children'.

The 'paedophile'

The way photographs can distinguish 'others' in the culture has been examined in some depth. As Fishman and Marvin (2003) explore in their comparison of photographs showing violence in US and non-US settings, images of 'others' differ quite substantially. Anthropologists, in particular, have focused on the techniques used to make the 'other' appear particularly immoral, bizarre, sub-human, and sexual (Edwards, 1992; Lutz and Collins, 1993). The same techniques can be seen here in terms of photographing the offenders; 'others' who live within the culture. As Soothill and Walby (1991) conclude, the media helps to perpetuate the myth that sex crimes are committed by 'other' men, using terms such as 'fiend' and 'beast', which distance them from 'ordinary' men. These textual labels are supported by frequently employed techniques, including cropped, carefully selected shots, and dark lighting, helping to paint the offender as a 'demonic monster'. As Valier (2004) asserts, 'the power to punish is a power of the image' (p. 251), and mug shots of the offenders support the growing calls and demands for harsher punishments and stricter legislation. The assumption that serious offenders, particularly those who commit crimes against children, are 'pure evil' remains a powerful notion, even in advanced

societies (Baumeister, 1996), and it is prevalent in the press, both broadsheet and tabloid. However, when 'evil' is the accepted explanation, there is little tolerance for attempts to contextualize these offenders, and darkened mug shots of offenders are certainly unable to provide any contextualization to the person, their life and their crimes.

In the 1990s, the texts that implied sex offenders were living on every corner, threatening the safety of all children, provided the context for the images of the offenders. Howard Hughes, Roy Whiting, Lewis Lent and Jesse Timmendequas were all represented very similarly, although British press regulations dictated that photographs could only be published post verdict, or a few days before, if admissible by the judge. The absence of such legislation in the USA meant images of these two American offenders were far more frequent, but ultimately their representation was always of men in the stand, men on the verge of conviction. On the day of Timmendequas' conviction, the *New York Times* ran a photograph of him, standing in the dock, staring blankly ahead, with the caption 'Jesse Timmendequas listened impassively to his death sentence' (21 June 1997, p. 1).

Photographs of the two British men in the 1990s' sample were equally one dimensional, because the restrictions imposed on newspapers meant they had to rely on the visuals provided by the authorities. Once the verdicts had been reached, however, photojournalists worked hard to gather 'new' images. One revealing example is a photograph of Roy Whiting (Figure 1), the man accused of killing Sarah Payne, which was carried in all newspapers in the sample on the day the verdict was reached. This extreme close-up, showing him straining his neck, almost makes him look as if he is ready to make his escape. The photograph, taken by AP reporter Chris Ison, would have been chosen specifically from potentially hundreds of similar photographs of Roy Whiting leaving the courtroom, and the fact that all newspapers chose to use the image demonstrates the common codes that currently shape the coverage of crime and criminals. This is a rare photograph because it was in colour, as the majority of the photographs of the offenders were black and white (this was clearly only an applicable category for photographs from the 1990s). In comparison, photographs of the victims from the 1990s were often in colour.

The *Daily Mirror* decided to use the straining photograph of Roy Whiting across the full front cover, juxtaposing that image with the instantly recognizable school photograph of Sarah Payne in the corner, framed by the oval border. The caption to the photograph of Whiting reads 'MONSTER: The leering face of sex brute Roy Whiting as he was driven to court during the trial at Lewes'. Similarly, one photograph of Howard Hughes printed in the *Daily Mirror* showed him peeking out of a window. One can only assume that, like Whiting, it was from the window of the car as he raced past reporters. The caption reads: 'EVIL



Figure 1 Front page of the *Daily Mirror* on 13 December 2001

EYES: Hughes haunted resorts' (19 July 1996, p. 9). Therefore, a photograph taken of him peeking out of a car window, avoiding the flashlights and long lenses of the photojournalists, is connoted as him, before he was captured, keeping a look-out from his home for his next victim.

Victims' Rights Movement: the grief of the victims' families

All photographs of the victims had to be taken from the past, but photographs of the victims' families were a combination of family album snapshots, juxtaposed with candid shots of their grief as the case unfolded. Emotive photographs of grieving family members were frequently used in the coverage from these decades, often in the tabloid press, but also in the broadsheets. Photographs of the mother were the most common type of photograph. In the earlier periods, photographs of the mother emphasized their grief, with images of them supported by friends and family, accompanied by literal captions such as 'The Sad Mother' (*Daily Mirror*, 9 December 1965, centre pages) and 'The Tragic

Mother' (*Daily Mirror*, 11 December 1965, p. 4), but these images were few and far between. I would suggest there was a lower tolerance for explicit cases of newspaper intrusion than in more recent times, when public displays of emotion are expected and highly sought (Anderson and Mullen, 1998; Mestrovic, 1997; Pantti, 2005; West, 2004).

Images of the victims' mothers were included in the coverage from all three decades, but in the past 20 years they have become far more prevalent, a change that I would argue has been influenced by a combination of the rise of the Victims' Rights Movement alongside the increased influence of a 'confessional culture'. As Valier and Lippens (2004) argue, '[w]hen the call for justice comes through the grief-stricken plea of the mother of a murdered child, it carries a potent affective charge, levying an unassailable demand for our concern and commanding urgent attention' (p. 319). Grief has a moral authority, and the grief of those left behind after an unprovoked murder is a force which helps to power the Victims' Rights Movement. The determination of a grief-stricken relative makes a rational discussion of crime policy very difficult. As Sarah Payne's mother explained in an interview in the *Observer* about the motivation for her battle to pass 'Sarah's Law', 'It's also selfish. I don't want Sarah to be forgotten. I don't want her to become another statistic, and people look at her face and think, "Who's that?" As it stands, nobody's forgotten her name or her face' (Ellen, 2004). Nobody has forgotten her mother's name or face either.

Victims with their family

By the 1990s, as well as the posed portrait of the victim, both types of newspapers would publish numerous photographs of the victims as part of loving family images, either posed family portraits or candid family 'snaps', capturing special moments of the victims' lives. The popularity of cameras and the traditions which shape family photographs mean that picture editors would ask for, and receive, these photographs directly from the family, for reasons linked to the desire to keep the story in the public consciousness, particularly until the perpetrator had been captured. These photographs are probably some of the most highly selected images in news. They were first selected by the families, as ones which best represent their child in the ways they wanted them to be remembered, and then selected and positioned alongside other photographs by photo editors. Creating montages further underlined the tragedy of the crime by forcing readers to identify with the idyllic family album photographs, and to place themselves as part of the grieving family.

These family photographs are so powerful because all can relate to them. Discussing family snapshots, Alan Coleman reminds us that:

they are made, treasured, scrutinized, lived with, and passed on. As a demotic artefact, the photo album is so ubiquitous and so much taken for granted as part of life of our society that it seems somewhat shocking and revealing to encounter one of those rare families . . . which has kept no family album. (1975: 35)

Not only do we all have similar photographs, but we also know the codes of such photographs. We know that these photographs are taken during certain moments: family, religious or social rituals, births, birthdays, scholarly achievement, and weddings. In amateur photographs 'the sunny side of the street eclipses the seamy side' (Milgram, 1977: 54). As Julia Hirsch notes, these photographs never 'show grades failed, jobs lost, opportunities missed The family pictures we like best are poignant – and optimistic' (1981: 118). One of the rituals of family life that does not get photographed is a funeral. That is perhaps why the images of the funerals of these victims sit uncomfortably with us. We are accustomed to seeing other people's family snapshots; we are not accustomed to sharing the grief of a family during a funeral.

Snapshot images of the offenders were rare. In a few cases, usually the day after the verdict, the newspapers would publish a couple of photographs of the offenders during previous periods, usually accompanying articles attempting to understand how the person was able to commit such a crime, searching their background for a clue to their 'monstrosity'. But these photographs humanize, an impossible feat when the coverage has worked so hard to recreate these men as monsters. In this modern day morality tale, the monster must not be contextualized or explained. The offender personifies evil, so while we share the life of the victims in family snapshots and portraits, the offender appears without a past or history.

Public grief

By the 1990s, images of the local community had developed into images of the wider society grieving for the victims. In his argument that modern society is plagued by 'conspicuous compassion' (which he labels 'mourning sickness'), the conservative commentator Patrick West (2004) compares earlier tragedies such as the Dunblane massacre in 1987 and the Hillsborough football stadium disaster in 1989 with events in the 1990s and beyond, and argues there is something very different about those two periods. 'There was grief and anger, yet this was relatively localised' (p. 8). By the 1990s, the abduction and murder of a child certainly sparked reactions which were far from localized. They were marked by public demonstrations of grief, with roadside flower, candle and teddy-bear shrines, people travelling distances to attend the victims' funerals, and other forms of 'grief tourism'. The discourse creates the impression that everyone is grieving together, and this is supported by multiple images which reinforce

this idea. Kitch (2000), in her discussion of the public mourning in US news magazines, emphasizes how the public reaction to extraordinary deaths has become a news story in its own right, and certainly there is a media template (Kitzinger, 2000) in place for covering tragic events. Several scholars have outlined how this template works (Cloud, 1998; Kitch, 2000, 2003; Walter et al., 1995), and, as Pannti (2005) notes, '[t]ypically they are represented as integrative events, moments of national consensus and unity born out of mourning together' (p. 365). Coverage from both the USA and the UK in the 1990s bore the hallmarks of unity through public grief, and images of packed funerals, roadside shrines, and close-ups of cards left by complete strangers were included in both types of newspapers. One example from the *New York Times* exemplifies this type of image, with a photograph of crowds dispersing from a community vigil, holding candles and wearing ribbons, with the caption:

Families walking home after a vigil last evening in Hamilton Township, N.J., for Megan Kanka, the 7-year old who was strangled last weekend. More than 1,000 people attended in support of a new law that would require sex offenders to notify local officials when they move into a community. (3 August 1994, p. B4)

Public anger

West (2004: 14) is quick to point out the relationship between public grief and anger: 'When the crowd is in the mood for collective caring, mob violence will invariably follow. A society that feels it normal to send flowers to perfect strangers will also feel it acceptable to throw stones at them too'. He continues, 'conspicuous compassion dictates that grief will turn into grievance and grievance into vengeance' (p. 16). Certainly, coverage from the 1960s showed crowds gathering outside police stations and courtrooms, but by the 1990s, and particularly the late 1990s, anger spilled out into the wider public as fears spiralled about convicted paedophiles released into local communities. In the USA, the passage of Megan's Law (in response to the murder of Megan Kanka by Jesse Timmendequas), which enabled residents to learn whether a known sex offender lived in their midst, led to incidences of vigilantism. However, in the UK, the refusal of the Home Secretary to pass a similar law resulted in the *News of the World* listing the names and addresses of all 110,000 known sex offenders. The result was a number of demonstrations, most famously in the Paulsgrove estate near Portsmouth where mobs targeted listed offenders. The newspapers in my sample were keen to provide images of these events, as they appeared to capture the mood of fear and subsequent anger shared by different communities in the country, which had been the focus of so many of their articles during this period.

Discussion

Since this study ended in 2000, the patterns visible in the coverage from the last decade have simply escalated. The murder of two children in Cambridgeshire in the summer of 2002 illustrated even more powerfully the main findings outlined here: that such stories are illustrated almost entirely with emotionally charged 'personal' and 'societal' visuals, thereby framing this crime through the experiences of the victims' relatives, as well as the reactions of the wider society. The visuals suggest to readers that this is no longer a personal affair; it is one which affects us all, and it affects us at an emotional level. For crimes such as this, the implication is that the rationality which has dictated western ideals about criminal justice needs to be momentarily side stepped, as rationality has no place when dealing with the brutal abduction, sexual assault and murder of an innocent child.

These images work together to create a story that dismisses the subtleties of the case. The emphasis on the pain and suffering of the victims' relatives leaves little consideration for the criminal justice system, and breeds yet more ignorance about sexual offenders and ways to prevent similar tragedies from happening again. Similarly, the emphasis on community anger and frustration frames the story as one which has been caused by incompetence and negligence. The complications surrounding treating known paedophiles and creating the circumstances necessary for them to rebuild their lives is lost in photographs of angry mobs hurling bricks at windows. It is easier to blame councils for rehousing released offenders into the communities than to consider the role society itself plays in encouraging paedophilia through increasingly sexualized images of children. And it certainly does not encourage any thoughtful discussions about how to manage those who have previously offended in order to enable them to rebuild their lives within supportive communities.

Emotionality and crime news

The overwhelming use of emotional 'personal' and 'societal' visuals framed the coverage in the 1990s. Discussions about the increase in public displays of emotion in society range from those who find the trend contemptible (Furedi, 2004; Mestrovic, 1997; O'Hear, 1998; West, 2004), through those who believe it plays an important function (Mcguigan, 2000; Pantti, 2005; Walter et al., 1995), to those who question whether it really exists to the extent suggested by and played out in the media (Thomas, 2002). In their discussion of news coverage of tragic deaths, Walter et al. (1995) believe these public illustrations of public grieving allow others to 'learn' how others react to one of our last remaining taboos, death. I would argue that to lump these patterns into the arguments

about 'dumbing down', and to dismiss outright the increased levels of emotionality in news coverage is pointless. Newspapers reflect cultural norms, and, as Furedi (2004) outlines, the therapeutic turn has infiltrated both the private and public spheres. It would be impossible for photojournalists to capture emotional photographs of relatives as well as strangers weeping over the loss of a child, if they did not exist. While still acknowledging this, and accepting that there will be an inevitable seeping of emotion into our newspapers, caution needs to be exercised on this issue of crime. Mourning for Diana, or victims of natural disasters is in a different category to the victims of serious violent crimes.

Finally, while these findings are certainly revealing, it is unclear whether they apply solely to this type of crime, during these particular decades, or whether the visual representation of these crimes offers us a template for the way serious crime is covered in the press. I would suggest that similar patterns would be visible in the coverage of other types of violent crimes, with greater numbers of images depicting the victims and their relatives, similar decontextualized representations of the offenders, and visuals illustrating the impact on the wider community. The forces embedded in the Victims' Rights Movement, combined with the desire for illustrations of public emotional expression has, I have little doubt, spread into other forms of crime reporting. Katz (1987) argued that criticizing crime coverage was nonsensical, as crime news functions as a moral compass providing guidance for people in navigating their own everyday journeys through the forces of right and wrong. Certainly these photographs helped to confirm societal boundaries, both in terms of childhood and adulthood, as well as confirming the boundaries between the law-abiding and the most deviant in society. The prevalence of bold images juxtaposing victim and offender, good and evil, allows a visual retelling of the same story whether or not the words are read. But these stories of personal loss, as well as community grief and anger, were illustrated with images of raw human emotion. It is therefore very likely that the response of readers would be to share those emotions, rather than contextualizing the crimes and those who commit them.

As psychologists (see for example Brown, 1976; Gehring et al., 1976; Jenkins et al., 1967) have demonstrated, visual images are recognized and recollected more quickly, and for longer periods of time, than words. And as others have subsequently argued (Graber, 1996; Messaris, 1996), powerful images may prevent critical engagement with an issue, something Lance Morrow took for granted in his claim in a *Time* magazine article that powerful news images 'are mainlined directly into the democracy's emotional bloodstream without the mediation of conscious thought' (1993: 36). Stuart Hall acknowledged this 'power' of images back in 1973 when he stated:

news photographs have a specific way of passing themselves off as aspects of 'nature'. They repress their ideological dimensions by offering themselves as literally visual-transcriptions of the 'real world' . . . They also guarantee and underwrite its objectivity (that is they neutralize its ideological function). (p. 241)

'Personal' images, the core of this sample, encourage empathetic responses which disarm readers' critical reasoning.

Notwithstanding the potential damage such pre-trial media coverage can play in terms of the fairness of any trial, repeated crime coverage that relies on such similar conventions of emotionality will perpetuate the narrow boundaries which limit contemporary discussions of crime, those who commit it and the criminal justice system. As critics (Kaminer, 1995; Sarat, 1997) are increasingly warning, ' . . . the institutionalization of emotion into the system of justice represents the rehabilitation of the instinct of revenge' (Furedi, 2004: 203). When we see politicians reacting with populist 'knee-jerk' reactions to serious crimes which appear to touch the public's imagination, public understanding of the principles of criminality and justice need to be based on more than emotional images of grieving mothers, ominous and sinister mugshots of offenders, and vengeful communities. Without critical engagement or discussion, knee-jerk reaction laws such as Megan's Law (pieces of legislation Valier, 2005, calls Memorial Laws) are much more likely to be passed and wholeheartedly accepted by the community. While some of these discussions do occur within the texts, the powerful visual images tell their own, one-dimensional, version of the crime.

While I acknowledge the institutional pressures faced by newspapers, the potential impact of their coverage of such crimes is great. A glance back at previous decades in different newspapers demonstrates that these crimes have not always been illustrated identically. Despite the rhetoric spouted at the turn of the last century about the power of newspaper photography to act as the ultimate truth, we are now well aware of the limitations of that argument. Picture editors have a choice and their selections shape the way we perceive these crimes and consider how those who have committed them should be treated.

Notes

- 1 The decision to compare the UK with the USA was based on the author's personal experience of living in the USA for an extended period of time, and being able to conduct part of the research process there.

- 2 In the UK, the 1925 Criminal Justice Act 1925, section 41, prohibited the taking of any photograph, or making any portrait or sketch in court with a view to publication. As a result there were very few photographs of any of the offenders in the British newspapers, as the editors had to wait until the verdict had been reached. In the USA, such a blanket law does not exist meaning there were many more photographs in the US half of the sample.

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